Reviewer’s report

Title: Voluntary HIV counselling and testing among men in rural western Uganda: implications for HIV prevention

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Reviewer: Leickness Chisamu C Simbayi

Reviewer’s report:

Simbayiâ##s Review of manuscript by Francis M Bwambale1, Sarah N Ssali1,2, Simon Byaruhanga1,3, Joan N Kalyango1, Charles AS Karamagi1Â§
Voluntary HIV counselling and testing among men in rural western Uganda: implications for HIV prevention

1. Topic: Is the topic relevant for the journal?
   Yes, highly so

2. Title: Does the title reflect the contents of the article?
   Yes, it does

3. Originality: Is the work original? (If not, please give references)
   Yes, it is

4. Abstract: To what extent does the abstract reflect aspects of the study: background, objectives, methods, results and conclusions?
   It does so mostly but omits qualitative results which are only presented in the Conclusions

5. Introduction / Background: Is the study rationale adequately described?
   Partly, some pertinent is only presented much later in the Discussion rather than in the Introduction.

6. Objectives: Are the study objectives clearly stated?
   Yes, they are.

7. Methodology: (please provide examples and evidence for your response, do not simply answer yes or no)
   7.1 To what extent is the study design appropriate for the objectives?
   Very much so. The use of triangulation combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods strengthens the study immensely. This must be acknowledged in the manuscript.
7.2 Is the sample size appropriate and adequately justified?
Yes, the sample sizes are appropriate for both research methods that were used. In particular, the sample size for the survey is adequately justified.

7.3 Is the sampling technique appropriate and adequately described?
Yes, both methods used for sampling are appropriate.

7.4 How well are the methods and instruments of data collection described?
The method and instrument used in the survey are adequately described. However, there is no description provided for the focus group guide. It just mentions that it contains predetermined topics without actually mentioning the topics.

7.5 How well are techniques to minimize bias/errors documented?
They are well described especially for the survey.

8. Ethical Consideration: Are issues related to ethics adequately described?
(For human studies, has ethical approval been obtained?)
No, they are not. However, it is disclosed that ethical approval was obtained.

9. Analysis and results:
9.1 Are the methods of data analysis appropriate?
Yes, the are

9.2 Is statistical significance well documented (e.g. as confidence intervals or P-value)?
Yes, it is for the survey (i.e., quantitative) component of the study.

9.3 Are the findings presented logically with appropriate displays and explanations?
Yes, they are.

10. Discussion:
10.1 How well are the key findings stated?
Very well, overall except for two key tables that are missing one on biographical characteristics of the sample (should be Table 1), and the other containing the results of the logistic regression analysis (Table 4). In fact the presentation of the latter on page 14 should be in a separate paragraph and not combined with the preliminary bivariate analyses.

10.2 To what extent have differences or similarities with other studies been
discussed and reasons for these given?
This has been done adequately.

10.3 Are the implications of these findings clearly articulated?
Yes, they are.

11. Conclusion(s): Do the results justify the conclusion(s)?
Yes, they do.

12. References:
12.1 Are they appropriate and relevant?
Yes, they are.

12.2 Are they up to date?
Yes, they are.

12.3 Do they follow the recommended style?
Yes, they do.

12.4 Are there any errors?
No, not at all that I can spot.

13. Writing: Is the paper clearly written?
Yes, it is.

13.1 Are there problems with the grammar / spelling / language?
No, there are not.

13.2 Is the paper presented logically (e.g. correct information in each section, logical flow of arguments)?
Yes, it is.

Recommendations
Please select one of the following recommendations:

1. The paper can be published as it is:
2. The paper can be published with minor revisions as suggested: X
3. The paper can be published with major revisions as suggested:
   If you choose this option, do you want to review the revised paper? Yes/No
4. The paper is more suitable for publication in another journal:
5. The paper is not acceptable to be published in this journal:
6. Other (explain) .................................................................................................................................

Do you want your name revealed to the author? Yes / No

Please state any relevant competing interests: None.

Please provide specific suggestions to improve the manuscript below:

In the background, the literature review is not critical. They are several sources which believe that the epidemic has run its natural course in Uganda and that no miraculous interventions have succeeded as such in reducing HIV infections. Interestingly this is apparent in the Discussion of the results on Risky sexual behaviour on page 17.

Before “Study design, population and sampling” a sub-heading “Survey” should be indicated half-way on page 5 as this is done later for focus groups.

On page 13, the last two sentences should form a separate paragraph as they derived from focus groups.

Group counselling is first mentioned at the bottom of page 18 perhaps all the VCT strategies used in Uganda must be mentioned early in the Introduction.

Limitations of the study on page 19 are rather scanty. Actually a non-response rate of 14% is excellent as a response rate of 70% and above in quantitative research are considered good. What of self-report data as being mainly unreliable?